

Title of submission: Forms of *intercultural Pygmalionism* in two Finnish novels

Summary: This article examines the construction, expression and negotiation of *intercultural pygmalionism* in two Finnish novels, in which the main protagonists experience a need/an urge for change of national identity. Intercultural pygmalionism is a common phenomenon in intercultural encounters. Pygmalionists attempt to construct a certain image of the ‘national self and other’ and thus to copy certain national characteristics to become like the *Other*. The two novels under scrutiny, *Stalin’s Cows* by Sofi Oksanen (2003) and Miika Nousiainen’s *The Refugee of the Boat-Shaped Pink Candy* (2007), each describe specific forms of pygmalionism. Nousiainen’s Finnish character manages to become a “real” Swedish after months of training, while Oksanen’s bulimic Finno-Estonian hero, under the guidance of her mother, battles to pass as a real Finn and hide marks of ‘Estonianness’. A constructivist and critical approach to the ‘intercultural’ (Dervin, 2011) is used to analyse excerpts from the novels.

Forms of *intercultural Pygmalionism* in two Finnish novels

THE NOTE TAKER. You see this creature with her kerbstone English: the English that will keep her in the gutter to the end of her days. Well, sir, in three months I could pass that girl off as a duchess at an ambassador's garden party. I could even get her a place as lady's maid or shop assistant, which requires better English. That's the sort of thing I do for commercial millionaires. And on the profits of it I do genuine scientific work in phonetics, and a little as a poet on Miltonic lines.

Bernard Shaw (1916). *Pygmalion*

This excerpt is taken from the famous play written by Bernard Shaw (1916), in which a phonetician transforms an English flower-girl into a Lady, by teaching her to speak and behave like one. The title of the play, *Pygmalion*, borrowed from Ovid's story of a sculptor who falls in love with his own statue, later brought to life by Venus (Yeates, 2010), has inspired me to work on a common problematic phenomenon in intercultural encounters: the idea that one can become/be turned into a "cultural Other". I shall call this phenomenon *intercultural pygmalionism* in this study. The notion refers to the alteration of the self and one's identity based on a solidly established understanding of culture, which is often reduced to national characteristics.

In order to illustrate and problematize this phenomenon, I use two novels that were published recently in Finland. A sovereign nation state since 1917, the Nordic

country of Finland is often characterised by “cultural homogeneity” and emigration and has just recently experiences mass-immigration (Riikonen & Dervin, 2012). As a consequence, art and popular productions increasingly bear witness to this new phenomenon. In the novels under scrutiny here, the main characters are either incited to or led to become an Other, i.e. a “representative” of another country, a member of an imaged community (Anderson, 1983). One of the characters emigrates to Sweden while the other one was born in Finland in a Finno-Estonian family.

The first novel, written by Sofi Oksanen, is entitled *Stalin's cows* (*Stalinin lehmät* in Finnishⁱ) and was published in 2003. Oksanen has received many national and international prizes (e.g. The Nordic Council Literature Prize 2010, the French *Prix Femina Étranger* 2010) and is known in English-speaking worlds for her novel “Purge” (cf. <http://www.sofioksanen.com/biography/>). *Stalin's Cows* has not been translated into English yet and I will be analysing excerpts translated from the French version of the novel which was published under the name “*Les vaches de Staline*” in 2011. The novel deals with the identity crises of a young bulimic girl, Anna, whose mother is Estonian and father Finnish, who lives in Finland.

The second novel under scrutiny, written by Miika Nousiainen, is not available in English either. It is entitled *Vadelmavene-pakolainen* in Finnish, which translates roughly as “the refugee of the boat-shaped pink candy”ⁱⁱ. These pink candies are quite popular in Finland. They are produced in Sweden and are often associated with the Scandinavian country. The main character, Finn Mikko Virtanen, has decided to do anything to become Swedish, or as he calls it a “*Nationalitetstransvestii*” (a national transvestite), arguing that he “was born and raised to the wrong nationality”. The book was first published in 2007.

I am working from the Swedish version published in 2009 under the title *Hallonbåtsflyktingen*ⁱⁱⁱ.

A constructivist and critical approach to the ‘intercultural’ (Dervin, 2011) is used to analyse excerpts from the novels.

1. The pygmalion effect in the ‘intercultural’

In psychology Pygmalionism describes a certain love feeling towards an object that we have created ourselves, especially through falling in love with a statue (Satz, 2009; Hersey, 2010). For Satz (ibid.), pygmalionism means the love of a statue as a statue, i.e. people are aware of the fact that what they love is an object and not a representation of an actual individual.

In this article, I argue that the ‘intercultural’, through often being based on reified and culturalist visions of the Other (Abdallah-Preteuille, 1986, 2003), can lead to Pygmalionism: I (co-)invent an image of the Other, whom I reduce to solid national characteristics, I believe in this invention, fall in love with it (or reject it) and try to copy it – even though I might be aware of the fact that it is an invention. In his book, *Becoming Otherness*, Alex Gillespie (2006) demonstrates how tourists in Nepal are well aware of the fact that some of the cultural artefacts (objects, dance, “traditions”...) presented and performed for them were reinvented. Many of them say that it does not actually disturb them as it is part of the “economic façade” of tourism: we pay them and they “perform” for us (ibid.). Still they enjoy the performed differentialism and exoticism.

It is easy to see the connection between intercultural Pygmalionism and the

concept of identity. We live in an era characterised by many thinkers as leading to “a general anxiety for identity” (Bayart, 2005, pp. 23). For the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (2004, pp. 17), “identity is the ‘loudest talk in town’, the burning issue on everybody’s mind and tongue”. Amin Maalouf (2000), in his book *In the Name of Identity: Violence and the Need to Belong*, asserts that we all believe that we know what the concept of identity means and that we continue to ‘trust’ it, even though it is a “treacherous concept”. For Laplantine (1999, pp. 17): “today identity has become a slogan that we brandish as a totem or that we repeat in a compulsive manner as a proof that gives the impression that we have solved precisely what poses a problem” (my translation). He adds that the concept makes us believe in stability and solidity (ibid.: 148). I would like to explore in what follows the links between identity and interculturality, and thus pygmalionism.

2. Intercultural Pygmalionism and identification

Accelerated globalisation (Pieterse, 2004) has led to many preconceived ideas about our worlds. Amongst these, the idea that people and “cultures” are becoming increasingly similar has gained popularity (Assayag, 1998, pp. 205; Bayart, 2005, pp. 53). This is not a new argument though, as e.g. already in 1953, the French poet and essayist Claude Roy wrote “apparently the earth is now small, a monotonous ball crossed by planes, which has shrunk, where its many and varied countries do not surprise us any more” (1953, pp. 334; my translation). But in fact, the world, through processes of glocalisation, where the global is intertwined with the local, is more complex than ever.

It is important to note that nation-states still hold an important position in the expression and construction of a normalized, stable, imagined and homogenizing identity – national identity and culture. Yet as it is imagined, this means that we cannot “understand a person on the basis of this identity” (Kaufmann, 2008, p. 4; my translation) as national identity is “sufficiently polysemic to allow personal interpretation and commitment to a cultural space that ‘we share in common’” (Lull, 2000, p. 164).

Many researchers and thinkers agree that contemporary individuals experience new allegiances to many and varied groups and communities – not just the Nation-State. Sociologist Nicole Aubert (2004, p. 20) asserts that “durable and attaching engagements have been replaced by short-lived and interchangeable encounters” (my translation), which multiply identification processes. Many telling phrases have been used by researchers to refer to this phenomenon: *pseudo-communities* (Beniger, 1987, pp. 352-371), *cloakroom-communities* (Bauman, 2004, p. 31), *neo-tribes* (Maffesoli, 1997), to which people associate for a specific amount of time (professionals, tourists, sport, fans, etc.). Bauman (ibid., p. 31) defines them as follows: they are “patched together for the duration of the spectacle and promptly dismantled again once the spectators collect their coats from the hooks in the cloakroom”.

A direct consequence of this “double-bind” (the stability of the ‘national’ and multiple identification with many and varied communities) symbolises “a crisis of meanings” which leads to the uncontrollable multiplication of identity quests (Augé & Colleyn, 2004, pp. 16-17) and the development of imaginaries (Maffesoli, 1993, p. 35). Of course, it is important to bear in mind that “there are limits to how far we can opt in and out of identities” (Howarth, 2002, p. 146), depending, amongst others, on one’s

social, cultural, economic capitals. Also even though hybridity and *métissage* are intrinsic parts of the individual, it has been argued that they are often “feared” by decision-makers and people themselves (Andrieu, 2008, p. 22).

This is why the concept of identity is important in working on ‘intercultural pygmalionism’ as “Without an understanding of identity we could not explain why and how different people use representations to different ends – to legitimize, to contest, to negate, to transform” (Howarth, 2006, p. 66). I would like to advance the idea that intercultural Pygmalionism is a by-product of postmodernity and the complexification of identity, which is used to position oneself, to differentiate or claim commonality with others but also to defend oneself against e.g. marginalization, discrimination, etc. (Howarth, 2006, p. 72). Pygmalionism is a fine example of how today our worlds tend to create “artificial others” (Baudrillard & Guillaume, 1994, p. 21), who are reduced to one single entity, without recognizing “difference within” (Pieterse, 2004).

3. Analysing Pygmalionism in interculturality

Now how do we work on intercultural pygmalionism? How do we analyse it in relation to the concepts of identity and representation? To start with, I would like to survey what new critical anthropology has to say about how to do anthropology. Anthropology, the science of the Human, has always been extremely inspirational for research on the ‘intercultural’ (Abdallah-Preteuille, 2003; Dervin & Fracchiolla, 2012). For the French anthropologist Eric Chauvier, who has proposed an *anthropology of the ordinary*, it is important for researchers to concentrate on anomalies and the “fearful strangeness of human communication” (2010, p. 118) rather than try to identify structures and logics.

For him, “this scepticism is opposed to the ideology of success which taints human sciences today” (ibid., my translation). Another contemporary French anthropologist, Alban Bensa (2010, p. 21), in agreement with Chauvier, argues that “everything is learnt, reinterpreted, reevaluated. We only have access to these processes of transformation” (my translation). He concludes that anthropology should thus be interested in the *political* of encounters and experiences rather than the *structural*, in the *plural* within rather than the *singular* (ibid.). As such, these renewed emphases in research on the Human are influenced by the outside world, well beyond national boundaries, as a place is “open to ideas and messages, to visitors and migrants, to tastes, foods, goods and experiences to a previously unprecedented extent” (McDowell, 1996, p. 38). Intercultural pygmalionism represents a counter-discourse to these proposals as it attempts to “purify” the Other by providing a simple, exclusive and anomaly-less image of the statue-like Other. Yet pygmalionism is an interesting case of “anomaly” as it wished to erase complexity and instability in the way the self and the other are conceived of.

Pygmalionism often derives from what the Swedish anthropologist Ulf Hannerz (1999) has described as “culturespeak”, the use of the concept of culture in a simple, objectivising and a-critical manner, giving culture an important agentive role in encounters. Unni Wikan (2002, p. 84), another Scandinavian anthropologist, reminds us that culture cannot feel, think and that it does not have “the ability to adapt to new circumstance and respond to changing situations”. Thus when working on the ‘intercultural’, researchers should scrutinize the relationships and interactions between *individuals* rather than between “cultures” (Abdallah-Preteille, 2003: 15; Dervin, 2011). Again intercultural pygmalionism represents an interesting counter-example as it

considers cultures as agents in intercultural encounters: it is an object, statue-like, that is constructed not a subject. Through ignoring the individuality or the (inter-)subjectivity of individuals and the influence of interactional contexts, pygmalionism believes in discourses on cultures and reproduces solid images of them.

What I am interested in in this article, as suggested by Martine Abdallah-Preteuille (2003, pp. 20-22), is to work on how pygmalionism transforms Others into objects, and how it legitimizes constructed and symbolic boundaries between the self and the other. In other words, I will be looking at how, in the two novels under scrutiny, the protagonists and those around them refer to cultural elements to construct themselves and others, to differentiate themselves from other people, to identify but also at the same time to evaluate others. For Howarth (2002), working on identification requires also to work on representation. She argues (ibid., p. 160) that “identification and re-presentation can be seen as different sides of the same coin. They are the delicately intertwined processes of one’s collaborative struggle to understand, and so construct, the world and one’s position within it”.

Representations on the self and the other can lead to two different types of intercultural pygmalionism, which we are going to explore in this article:

- *Auto-pygmalionism*, which is a form of pygmalionism, which is wished for and ‘done’ by one individual, based on his/her own decision. Several strategies relate to it: feeling better about the self, becoming accepted by others, hiding something from others, etc.
- *Hetero-pygmalionism* is imposed onto an individual by others. This is often the case of (neo-)essentialism and (neo-)culturalism (Holliday, 2010). In intercultural

hetero-pygmalionism, one person is limited to one (national) identity. In his discussion of culturalism, Jean-François Bayart (2005, p. 46) tells us that it “considers that a culture is composed of a stable corpus and is closed on itself, with representations, beliefs and symbols which are said to have strong affinity, with opinions, attitudes or behaviors”.

4. Pygmalionism in practice: A look at two Finnish novels

Let's now turn to the two novels to observe various forms of pygmalionism. I have chosen these two novels as they symbolise very well the notion under scrutiny here, in its different forms.

At first sight, Anna's and Mikko's stories are very similar. Both are not satisfied with who they are (Anna: Finnish and a 'repressed' Estonian, Mikko: Finnish). But as their stories unfold, great differences clearly appear in the way pygmalionism is applied and constructed: in Sofia Oksanen's novel (*Stalin's Cows*), the main character, Anna, witnesses pygmalionising by her mother (hetero-pygmalionism) while in the other novel, the main character, Mikko, shapes himself 'successfully' into an Other, into a somewhat stereotypical Swede and 'dons' Mikael Andersson's identity (auto-pygmalionism), a Swedish alcoholic he met in Northern Sweden who committed suicide and who had agreed to help me to become a real Swede. Another difference is that Mikko does not feel well in his Finnish identity but becomes extremely enthusiastic, contented and “alive” when he officially “converts” (he obtains all of Andersson's official papers). Furthermore, Mikko manages to “adopt” certain signs and artefacts that he considers to make him a real Swede (he listens to Swedish pop songs, cries when Swedish celebrities

and politicians pass away, wears Swedish brands such as *Tiger of Sweden*, etc.). For instance on p. 42, he describes his flat in Finland: “my acquaintances like my flat, which is decorated with modern Swedish design classics. The building is one of the few that were designed by the Swedish architect Sven Markelius”. Finally he never criticises Sweden but repetitively mocks Finland. Anna, on the other hand, is sad throughout the novel: she does not feel Finnish nor Estonian but both, she does not feel at home either in Finland or in Estonia, but in both countries. Yet her mother persistently forces her not to “play the Estonian” in Finland, not to speak Estonian and to play the Finn in Estonia. Unlike Mikko, she keeps a critical eye open for both countries.

4.1. Constructing statue-like others and selves

A common phenomenon in both novels – and in intercultural encounters in general (Adballah-Preteuille, 1986; Holliday, 2010) – is the comparison of two spaces: Finland/Estonia (Anna) and Finland/Sweden (Mikko). Commenting on the relationship between her Finnish father and Estonian mother, Anna remembers that her mother told her that they spoke a lot about cultural differences before their wedding (p. 303).

In both novels, the protagonists seem to be doing that for two reasons: to find some meaning for their lives and to transform themselves better into Others. The following elements are compared: people, habits and objects.

Mikko regularly compares what he considers to be very Finnish and Swedish, by describing various habits: on p. 28, he asserts that he prefers the way people queue for cash dispensers in Sweden as they tend to follow the walls of the buildings instead of

forming a queue in the middle of the pavement; on the same page, he lauds Swedes for stopping at zebra crossings to let people pass – and concludes that Swedish drivers are altruistic and fair; on p. 31 he goes as far as comparing snow in Finland and in Sweden and deduces that even snow is purer and more beautiful in the latter. Mikko also comments on certain artefacts: on p. 18, “I felt that Xmas food and Xmas presents were much better in Sweden”; on p. 34 the pink boat-shaped candies (*hallonbåtar*) “tasted better and more real than Finnish ones”. Finally, part of the “Swedish branding” that he constructs is based on famous Swedish companies: on p. 73 he decides to book a flight on Scandinavian Airlines (SAS) from Stockholm to Bangkok (where he spends his holidays like most Swedes, he maintains) rather than fly from Copenhagen in Denmark, even if that would be cheaper. He explains that “at my age, one can easily spend a few extra hundred crowns to get service in one’s own mother tongue”. Lastly, on p. 74 he is a bit hesitant to jump into a taxi in Sweden because it is not a Volvo car.

Comparisons are also common in Oksanen’s novel but, unlike Nousiainen’s, they emerge from many and varied voices, especially Anna’s family – not so much from her own. As such, *Stalin’s Cows* recounts not only Anna’s story but also that of other characters: Anna’s mother and father and her grandparents in Estonia. Let us start with the parents, who met and started dating, before the mother moved to Finland, when Estonia was still part of the Soviet Union (1940-1991). Habits are also in the centre of their discussions: on p. 14, Anna’s mother does not understand the word “coffee break” in relation to work as it is said not to be a tradition in Estonia; on the same page, she asserts that Finns do their work properly, with care, and that materials do not disappear or that the result of their work does not get damaged on the next day; on p. 77 during her

first trip to Finland, her mother notes that “it is a quiet place, cars barely whistle as they pass, the streets are so clean, the shops full of things. And in the hotels they serve dishes with potatoes that have the colour of potatoes” – concluding that the potatoes were always blue in Estonia.

Many comparisons also suggest “biologization of cultural difference” (Hannerz, 1999), i.e. culture is related to/limited to the body. In *Stalin’s Cows* this is frequent. On p. 15 the mother compares again Finnish and Estonian workers: “Finnish workers are very different from Estonians, who are slow, have a red nose even during the week”. On p. 21 the mother even asserts that Estonians’ feet are sweatier than Finns’ and that their sweat smells more than the latter’s! For Mikko, his worship for “idyllist” Sweden and Swedes follows the same pattern. Again the body marks a major difference between Swedes and Finns. On many occasions in the novel, Mikko notes that Swedes are “beautiful suntanned people” (ex. p. 11). On p. 19 during a trip to Stockholm, he notices that people are “beautiful” and that they looked “happy”. For him, Swedes he sees on the streets in Stockholm are also very stylish and elegant (p. 19). Finally, Mikko often talks about the “beautiful” Swedish language.

This section has allowed us to demonstrate how intercultural pygmalionism is constructed by comparing two countries – and favouring one of them. Let us now examine if and how pygmalionism is implemented in what follows.

4.2. Desired/desiring Otherness

4.2.1. Transforming the self

In both novels, there is unambiguously a strong feeling of rejection of the self, a need to differentiate the self from the others – i.e. people who share their nationality. For Anna, it is evident in her description of her bulimia and it concerns both her Finnish and Estonian identities. Mikko eventually manages to borrow a Swede's identity and gets rid of what he considers his Finnishness. For both protagonists, this leads to renegotiating and inventing their selves.

To begin with, let us look at how the characters depict their differences with people from their own country. For Mikko, it is quite straightforward: he loathes Finland and Finnishness. On p. 20, he says:

“And I was so ashamed of them (Finns)(...) they lived their lives in Kouvola^{iv} in a housing estate where people spoke an ugly language. Sometimes at the market I would close my eyes and fantasize that I was in a picturesque Swedish town, at a Swedish party with happy people. This, of course, demanded a lot of imagination when one lived in Kouvola. I longed for joy and beauty, and I knew that I would find these things in Sweden”.

Little by little, Mikko finds some explanations to his willingness to become Swedish. His desired/desiring otherness is based on the fact that he does not recognize himself in what he considers to be Finnish: “Finland doesn't need me. I don't belong here. (...) I am not infused with enthusiasm with Formula 1, I don't feel like crying when I hear *Our Land*^v, I am not a big fan of sauna and deep inside I don't like to be silent or alone for a long

time^{vic} (p. 27). At some point in the novel, he starts quarrelling with Finnish transvestites who are demonstrating against discrimination (pp. 48-49). He tells one of them:

- Do you really think that you're a minority? Then you know nothing about minorities.
- It is not easy to be a transvestite in Finland!
- Oh yeah and what is so difficult about it?
- Not to be accepted.

Oh yeah not to be accepted! As a minority I know how it feels to be a minority.

As said before, Mikko defines his transformation as *national transvestism*.

His transformation appears to be complete halfway through the novel when he becomes Andersson, trained to be a Swede by the real Andersson. On p. 137 he exclaims: "My time as a Finn is over!". At the beginning of the novel, he had sworn that his Swedishness would be "perfect and complete" and that he would not be a "second class citizen" (p. 17). On 9th September 2006 Mikko is ready to be a real Swedish after his training period, during which he had learnt everything about Swedish society and how to behave like a Swede. In his own words: "I had become a better Swede than an average Swede!" (p. 146). In order to become Swedish, Mikko had to reflect on his Swedish origins, i.e. where he came from: "I look at myself in the mirror. (...) I try to find some regional characteristics in me" (p. 106). Mikko as Andersson lives and works in Gothenburg in southern Sweden. He wears exclusively Swedish brands (*Tiger of Sweden*, *Flippa K*, etc.) and remembers the city when he was a child: "I am walking the streets of my childhood. Everything is still the same" (p. 193).

As far as Anna is concerned, her transformation is different as it is, on the one hand, her mother and, on the other, Finnish society that require her not to behave and/or look like an Estonian. Many times in the novel, the main character denounces misconceptions that she had had to confront in Finland, especially in relation to her being also Estonian:

When people learnt about my Estonian origin, they asked me straight away if I was Russian^{vii}, if in my childhood I had played with Russian kids, and what games we had played. But what does it have to do with being Estonian? How come nobody ever asked me if I played with Estonians? I don't expect every Finn to speak sami or Swedish^{viii}. (p. 47)

Clothing represents a key identifying element in both novels. On p. 41, Anna reminds us that “in the 80s, Finnish girls wouldn't wear skirts (...) thus Anna must wear jeans in Finland to disguise as a Finnish girl, to be like the others, even if she doesn't want to”. On the other hand, when she is in Estonia (which she keeps calling “the country of happiness” in the novel), under the influence of her mother, Anna often wears trousers to pass as a foreigner (ibid.), the *Soome preili* (Estonian for the *Finnish girl*). The same goes for her mother when she moved to Finland (“when she started noticing that children stared at her”, p. 42). But this does not apply systematically to Anna, who refuses to play the “reindeer” (i.e. Finn) in Estonia: she tried to avoid all the typical tourist places for Finns in Tallinn, the capital of Estonia (the *Mustamäe* market, restaurants with menus in Finnish, etc. p. 401).

Besides clothing, Anna is told to walk like a Finn, to look like a Finn by her mother. She often describes how uncomfortable she feels about this: “(...) I never belonged to the right place, as if I was wearing a coat with different sized sleeves, which didn’t fit me” (p. 500). Her mother’s main fear was that people might discover that she is also Estonian and that they start treating her badly: “She always made me swear not to tell people about my origins. Not to be considered as an Estonian whore (...). Why is there a fur coat hanging in my corridor, and a winter coat with a Russian-looking fur lining? My mother points aggressively at a prostitute in Kallio^{ix} who wears a fox hat and collar? Why do I want to look like that? She does not want to admit that Finns wear those today too” (p. 390).

Even though Anna seems to blame her mother for not allowing her to “play” the Estonian, in a sense, she shares her mother’s fears as she does not like to talk about her origins, especially at school. On pp. 123-124 she explains how she had to invent some Finnish roots on her mother’s side for a class where everybody was to present their genealogical tree. On another occasion (p. 139) one of her friends’ mother asks her if she is Estonian. This is how Anna felt at that moment: “undressed, naked, dishonoured, sexually assaulted in public” (ibid.).

Now let’s turn to the question of language, which is essential for intercultural pygmalionism. In applied linguistics, the myth of learning how to speak like a “native speaker” – pygmalionism – has been largely studied (cf. Cook, 2007).

While Anna has a strong Finnish accent in Estonian (which she only speaks with her mother and family), Mikko manages to get rid of his Finnish accent in Swedish after months of training.

At the beginning of the novel, when Mikko is vacationing in Thailand, he meets a Swedish family. He becomes quite irritated by the fact that, even though he speaks very good Swedish, his interlocutors respond in English (p. 24):

- Hi there! Are you from Sweden?
- Yes indeed, how did you guess?
- I can always recognize Swedes. We haven't met before. My name is Mikko, I am from Finland.
- (in English in the novel): *Finland! How nice! My name is Jacob and this is my wife Lisa. Ylva and Petter! Say hello to Mikko!*
- Hi, hi...
- Hello Petter and Ylva.

It is always the same. I speak Swedish with them, a perfect Swedish, but they reply in Swedish. I don't understand why. But I don't give up and continue in Swedish.

- Based on your dialect I assume you come from the North. Umeå maybe?
- (in English in the novel): *No, no but very near, Sundsvall, do you know where Sundsvall is?*
- Of course, I have been there several times, a great place in the summer. Jovisst,
- (in English in the novel): *So you are from Finland, yksi kaksi kolme, koskenkorva, perkele, ei saa peittää. (...)*

Even if Mikko continues addressing them in Swedish, they reply in English. The last turn contains many Finnish words that are well-known in Sweden, which are said to be often

used by Swedes when they meet Finns. When Mikko becomes Andersson, he adopts the same strategy with a Finnish colleague in Gothenburg (p. 234).

Anna is not allowed to speak Estonian neither in Finland nor in Estonia. Even though her mother knows that she can actually speak Estonian, when they are visiting their Estonian relatives, she systematically translates everything in Finnish for her (p. 45). If Anna says a few words in the language, her mother becomes violent and shouts at her. Again her mother adopts this strategy to make her daughter's life easy in Finland: "she doesn't want her child to be remarked: in Finland a Russian will always be a Russian, even if they eat ham at Xmas together with Turku mustard^x. To be Estonian is not fashionable in Finland" (p. 46). That is actually one thing that Anna's therapist detects: "it was really strange that my mother didn't speak a word of her own language to her child (...) I never thought that it could be otherwise, but reflecting upon it, I realized that I didn't know a single multilingual family that didn't want to teach the parents' languages to the children" (p. 49). There are many clues in the novel revealing that Anna's mother has suffered from being Estonian in Finland – even though her own first name, Katariina, and her accent have often given her Finnish interlocutors the impression that she was Finland-Swedish, not Estonian (p. 69).

4.3. The end of pygmalionism?

Throughout the novels, another transformation seems to be taking place: the solid constructions of the Others and the self, based on the intercultural pygmalionism described above, are either modified or ended.

Anna seems to feel better about who she is, her duplicity in a sense, at the end of the novel. She plays several scenarii on pp. 491-491, summarizing the traumatic and irritating questions and discussions that she has had about her origins:

My mother is from Estonia.

But you speak very good Finnish, I believe you.

My mother has Estonian origins.

Does she have as strange a name as Estonians? Like *Siret, Kadi...* and we never know if they are male or female by seeing their names, because women have strange bird names: *blackbird, eagle...*

My mother is from Estonia.

Do you speak Russian fluently?

My mother is Estonian.

That's great. We know a family in Pärnu^{xi}, it is a really nice health resort, we go there from time to time, it's really cheap. You can buy new pairs of glasses for your whole family, sports clothes, vitamins, medicines and all. But well life conditions are not that good, it is so dirty, all over and...

My mother is Estonian.

My dad has girlfriends there. But don't tell mama.

My mother is Estonian.

No wonder you are so feminine! You see, Finnish women, they don't know how to be feminine.

My mother is from "Eesti"^{xii}.

What?

My mother is Estonian.

Really? Are you kidding me?

My mother is Estonian.

(snores)

My mother is originally from Eesti.

Is the food ready?

These reported discourses seem to be part of the process out of bulimia and the construction of self-confidence about her double identity that Anna witnesses at the end of the novel. Anna even finds the strength to tell her boyfriend about her origins, which she had been hiding at all costs until then: "I became courageous and told everything to my little troll^{xiii}. For the first time in my life, I am not lying and I begin to tell the truth. I am half Estonian and I have always suffered from eating disorders" (p. 504).

Interestingly, Anna's mother also seems to feel fine with her Estonian origins at the end of the novel and she starts e.g. to plant cornflowers, the national flower of Estonia, in her garden.

Mikko's story differs very much from Anna's as we have seen several times. He manages to get married to a Swedish lady and to have children – and thus live his dream of having a real Swedish family. For their Christmas holiday, they often go to Thailand. On one occasion, Swedish officers arrest him over there and jail him for having stolen Andersson's identity (Andersson had committed suicide). In jail, he meets some Finns that he befriends. His fascination with Sweden ends there and during an ice-hockey match, won by Finland against Sweden, he feels pride for his country of origins. The end of pygmalionism is evidenced in the following words: "I am disappointed in Sweden (...). Those who sit here (in jail) are second-class citizens. We are often told that Sweden is a very tolerant and multicultural country and that immigrants integrate quickly. But when I listen to the people here it's clear that this isn't true. Sweden is a happy place for Swedes, for native Swedes only" (p. 286).

Discussion and conclusion

This article aimed at examining two different cases of a common phenomenon in the 'intercultural, which I called *intercultural pygmalionism*. In the two novels that I analysed, pygmalionism displayed different characteristics. In Sofi Oksanen's novel, *Stalin's Cows*, pygmalionism was imposed on the main character, Anna. Even though she felt that she belonged to two different countries, Estonia and Finland, she was forced to

concentrate on her Finnish identity, which was imagined for her by her Estonian mother. Was pygmalionism a success for Anna? In a sense it seems that she was able to navigate her way through being Estonian and Finnish but she did not agree to ‘doing’ Finnishness. She was very much aware of the fact that by ‘doing’ Finnishness, she was reproducing a statue, she was contributing to her mother’s love of a statue as a statue. In Anna’s case, “the freedom in choosing our identity in the eyes of others can sometimes be extraordinarily limited” (Sen, 2006, p. 31). Mikko’s story, in Miika Nousiainen’s novel, is very different as Mikko manages to become the statue-like image of Sweden and the Swedes that he co-created (with the media and the common sense about Sweden). Pygmalionism was a success until he was arrested by the police and sent to jail. His reported perfect mastery of Swedish (he spoke like a native) also contributes to create an embellished image of pygmalionism. Mikko’s representations of Swedish culture and people also correspond to a good example of misrepresentations of “what is frequently a contested activity as if it were slavishly followed by all those associated with particular cultural groups” (Philips, 2010, p. 5). Finally, what is striking about Mikko’s pygmalionism is his constant deligitimization of Finland and the Finns (Bar-Tal, 1989), i.e. they are categorized into an extreme negative social category – until the Swedish fetish ends.

As asserted several times in this article, intercultural pygmalionism is a frequent phenomenon in our postmodern societies. Education often contributes to this way of seeing the Other and the Self. Language education but also in a sense many other school subjects (history, citizenship, religion...) are also prone to promoting pygmalionism (Neuner, 1997). Though social sciences are “more useful when they help us to reflect on

societies rather than judge them” (Fassin & Rechtman, 2007, p. 5), I feel that more work on the fetishism of pygmalionism in education could help us to avoid many and varied misunderstandings related to the ‘intercultural’.

One interesting aspect of this study is the importance given to objects, artefacts and symbols in inventing a pygmalionized self (clothing, brands, types of food, etc.). In a glocalizing world such as ours, and the *hyper-métissage* (Laplantine, 1999) that we are witnessing, it would be interesting and important to study such elements even more in research on the ‘intercultural’. In her recent article, *Nonhumans in social interaction* (2009), Karen Cerulo contends that nonhumans (“animals, objects, images, and both memories and projections of the self and others”, *ibid.*, p. 532) become part of our analytic frames when working on social interaction. I would like to argue that the future of research on the ‘intercultural’ and on pygmalionism would benefit immensely from orienting research in this direction.

References

- Abdallah-Preteille, M., 1986. *Vers une Pédagogie Interculturelle*. Paris: PUF.
- Abdallah-Preteille, M., 2003. *Former et Eduquer en Contexte Hétérogène. Pour un Humanisme du Divers*. Paris: Economica.
- Anderson, B., 1983. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.
- Andrieu, B., 2008. *Devenir Hybride*. Nancy: Presses Universitaires de Nancy.
- Assayag, J., 1998. La culture comme fait social global? *Anthropologie et (post)modernité. L’Homme*, 148, pp. 201-4.

- Aubert, N., 2004. *L'Individu Hypermoderne*. Toulouse: Eres.
- Augé, M. and Colleyn, J.C., 2004. *Anthropologie*. Paris: PUF.
- Bar-Tal, D., 1989. Delegitimization: The extreme Case of Stereo-typing and Prejudice. In: D. Bar-Tal, C. Graumann, A.W. Kruglanski and W. Stroebe, eds. *Stereotyping and Prejudice: Changing Conceptions*. New York: Springer-Verlag, pp. 169-188.
- Baudrillard, J. and Guillaume, M., 1994. *Figures de l'Altérité*. Paris: Descartes.
- Bauman, Z., 2004. *Identity*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Bayart, J.-F., 2005. *The Illusion of Cultural Identity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Beniger, J.R., 1987. Personalization of mass media and the growth of pseudo community. *Communication Research*, 14, pp. 352-371.
- Bensa, A., 2010. *Après Lévi-Strauss. Pour une anthropologie à taille humaine*. Paris: Textuel, coll. "conversations pour demain".
- Cerulo, K. A., 2009. Nonhumans in social interaction. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 35, 5, pp. 531-552.
- Chauvier, E., 2011. *Anthropologie de l'Ordinaire*. Toulouse: Anacharsis.
- Cook, V., 2007. The goals of ELT : reproducing native-speakers or promoting compétence among second language users ? In : J. Cummins and C. Davison, eds.. *Handbook on English language teaching*. Dordrecht: Kluwer, pp. 237-248.
- Dervin, F., 2011. A Plea for Change in Research on Intercultural Discourses: A 'Liquid' Approach to the Study of the Acculturation of Chinese Students. *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, 6, 1, pp. 37-52.

- Dervin, F. and Fracchiolla, B., eds. 2012. *Anthropology, Interculturality and Language Learning-Teaching*. Bern: Peter Lang.
- Fassin, D. and Rechtman, R., 2007. *L'empire du traumatisme. Enquête sur la condition de victime*. Paris: Flammarion.
- Gillespie, A. 2006. *Becoming Other: from Social Interaction to Self-Reflection*. New York: IAP - Information Age Publishing.
- Hannerz, U., 1999. Reflections on Varieties of Culturespeak. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 2, 3, pp. 393-407.
- Hersey, G. L., 2010. *Falling in Love with Statues: Artificial Humans from Pygmalion to the Present*. Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press.
- Holliday, A., 2010. *Intercultural Communication and Ideology*. London: Sage.
- Howarth, C., 2006. A social representation is not a quiet thing: Exploring the critical potential of social representations theory. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 45, pp. 65-86.
- Howarth, C. 2002. Identity in whose eyes?: the role of representations in identity construction. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 32, 2, pp. 145-162.
- Kaufmann, J.-C., 2008. *L'invention de Soi. Une théorie de l'Identité*. Paris: Hachette.
- Laplantine, J.-F., 1999. *Je, Nous et les Autres*. Paris: Pommier.
- Lull, J., 2000. *Media, Communication, Culture: A Global Approach*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Maalouf, A., 2000. *In the Name of Identity: Violence and the Need to Belong*. New York: Arcade Publishing.
- Maffesoli, M., 1993. *The shadow of Dionysus: A Contribution to the Sociology of the Orgy*. New York: State of New York University Press.

- Maffesoli, M. 1997. *The Time of the Tribes*. London: Sage.
- McDowell, L., 1996. *Gender, Identity and Place, Understanding Feminist Geographies*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Philips, A., 2010. *Gender and Culture*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Pieterse, J. N., 2004. *Globalization and Culture: Global Mélange*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Riikonen, T. & Dervin, F. 2012. Multiculturalism as Technologies of Power and the Construction of a Muslim Religious Identity Online in Finland and the Quebec Province (Canada). *Nordic Journal of Migration Studies*.
- Roy, C., 1953. *Clés pour la Chine*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Satz, A., 2009. Tableaux vivants: Inside the Statue. In: A. Satz and J. Wood, eds. *Articulate Objects: Voice, Sculpture and Performance*. Bern: Peter Lang, pp. 157-170.
- Sen, A., 2006. *Identity and Violence*. New Delhi: Penguin.
- Wikan, U., 2002. *Generous Betrayal*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Yeates, A., 2010. Recent Work on Pygmalion in Nineteenth-Century Literature. *Literature Compass*, 7, 7, pp. 586-596.

ⁱ Oksanen, S. 2011. *Les Vaches de Staline*. Paris: Stock.

ⁱⁱ Cf. a picture of the cover at: <http://kirjaintenvirrassa.blogspot.com/2010/09/oman-diagnoosini-mukaan-olen.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ Nousiainen, M. 2009. *Hallonbåtsflyktingen*. Stockholm: Blombergs.

^{iv} Kouvola is a small town in southeastern Finland, 130 km from Helsinki.

^v The Finnish national anthem (*Maamme* in Finnish, *Vårt Land* in Swedish, 1848).

^{vi} These last two elements are typical auto- and hetero-representations on Finnish people.

^{vii} Note that Estonia has a Russian ethnic minority of around 400,000 people. The total population was 1,339,646 (World Bank 2010).

^{viii} Swedish and Sami are spoken in Finland on top of Finnish. Swedish is the second official language.

^{ix} District in Helsinki.

^x *Turun sinappi* (Turku mustard) has a distinctive taste.

^{xi} A town in southwestern Estonia.

^{xii} Estonian word for Estonia.

^{xiii} The boyfriend's nickname.